

When I expressed doubts about the veracity of the Resurrection of Our Lord And Saviour Jesus Christ, a kind friend of mine sent to me as a rebuttal a 16-page document written in 1989 by Gary Habermas, a renowned researcher of the Bible, concerning the accuracy of the Resurrection stories<sup>1</sup>. My gracious friend, having been a diligent and obedient student of the Catholic Church, is genuinely worried about the safety of my soul. I could therefore feel only a loving touch to my heart at receiving this gesture.

Right at the outset, Habermas declares that the veracity of the Resurrection is the all-or-nothing criterion of the legitimacy of the Christian faith. That is, if proven true that the Resurrection actually occurred, then Christianity is the one, true faith; and if proven otherwise, utterly false. It is not hard to see that for Christian apologists, this kind of rebuttal is a big gamble, for it likens the veracity of the Resurrection to an artery, which, when cut, sees the whole body expire. Indeed, Paul says in 1Corinth 15:13-14 :

*But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.*

Habermas, upon describing the *grave* importance of verifying the Resurrection, sets forth 12 claims which he believes are the minimal facts:

1. Jesus died due to crucifixion
2. Jesus was buried afterwards
3. Jesus' death caused the disciples to experience despair and lose hope, believing that their master was dead.
4. Many scholars acknowledge several weighty arguments which indicate that the tomb in which Jesus was buried was discovered to be empty just a few days later
5. The disciples had real experiences which they thought were literal appearances of the risen Jesus
6. Due to these experiences, the disciples were transformed from timid and troubled doubters afraid to identify themselves with Jesus to bold preachers of his death and resurrection who were more than willing to die for their faith in him
7. This message was the center of preaching in the earliest church
8. This message was especially proclaimed in Jerusalem
9. The church was born as a result of this preaching
10. Sunday became the special day of worship
11. James, a brother of Jesus who had been a skeptic, was converted when he believed that he saw the resurrected Jesus
12. A few years later, Paul was also converted to the Christian faith by an experience which he, likewise, thought was an appearance of the risen Jesus

The remainder of his 16-page document discusses five major interpretations of the resurrection, and a description of the traditional method of Resurrection apologetics. Although not explicitly stated, the fact that it is called the "traditional" apologetic suggests that it is inadequate in its original form. Indeed, the 13 pages of Part II serve largely to strengthen the traditional apologetic by focusing on descriptions in the Canon, rather than constructing a new framework of apologetics.

The traditional apologetic is made of two parts:

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1 Habermas, Gary. "Jesus' Resurrection and Contemporary Criticism: an Apologetic." (1989).

1. The claim that naturalistic explanations of the visions of the resurrected Jesus are inadequate or less probable than an actual resurrection.
2. The claim that existing historical, textual, and material evidence *are* adequate to assert that the Resurrection actually occurred. After all, how could all the 12 facts described above be true at the same time if the Resurrection be false? Or so it is believed.

## Burden of Proof

Claims of the Resurrection must be presumed false unless proven true beyond reasonable doubt because of the following points:

1. Worshipers of Abrahamic religions already implicitly implement a policy of burden of proof. One thing common to nearly all devout worshipers of Abrahamic religions is the rejection of the worship of idols and earthly creations. If someone on the street points to an arbitrary object and declares it to be God and demanding of immediate worship, no Abrahamic passerby would comply without proof of divinity unless he or she have an unusual amount of gullibility.
2. What remains is the amount of rigor needed for this proof. We could suggest a lower bound needed for the amount of rigor by taking a look at surviving versions of Deuteronomy Chapters 13 and 18<sup>2</sup>.

Deut 13:1-6 states the following (in some translations, verse 1 is missing and the verse numbers are pushed back):

א את כל-הדבר, אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם--אתו תשמרו, לעשות: לא-תסף עליו, ולא תגרע ממנו. {פ}  
*All this word which I command you, that shall ye observe to do; thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it. {P}*

ב כי-יקום בקרבך נביא, או חלם חלום; ונתן אליך אות, או מופת  
*If there arise in the midst of thee a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams--and he give thee a sign or a wonder,*

ג ובא האות והמופת, אשר-דבר אליך לאמר: גלכה אחרי אלהים אחרים, אשר לא-ידעתם--ונעבדם  
*and the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spoke unto thee--saying: 'Let us go after other gods (which thou hast not known) and let us serve them';*

ד לא תשמע, אל-דברי הנביא ההוא, או אל-חולם החלום, ההוא: כי מנסה יהוה אלהיכם, אתכם, לדעת הַיִּשְׁכֶּם אֱהָבִים אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם, בְּכָל-לִבְבְּכֶם וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁכֶם  
*thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or unto that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God putteth you to proof, to know whether ye do love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.*

ה אחרי יהוה אלהיכם תלכו, ואתו תיראו; ואת-מצותיו תשמרו ובקלו תשמעו, ואתו תעבדו ובו תדבקו  
*After the LORD your God shall ye walk, and Him shall ye fear, and His commandments shall ye keep, and unto His voice shall ye hearken, and Him shall ye serve, and unto Him shall ye cleave.*

ו והנביא ההוא או חלם החלום ההוא יומת, כי דבר-סרה על-יהוה אלהיכם המוציא אתכם מארץ מצרים והפך מביית עבדים--להדיחך מן-הדרך, אשר צוה יהוה אלהיך ללכת בה; ובערת הרע, מקרבך. {ס}

<sup>2</sup> As a disclaimer, I only have a copy of the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia as the critical edition of the Old Testament, which is based largely on the Masoretic manuscripts of the 10<sup>th</sup> Century AD. The Deuteronomy of the Biblia Hebraica Quinta, which takes into account the Dead Sea Scrolls from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC - 1<sup>st</sup> Century AD, was published in 2007 as a separate volume. Furthermore, I am not fluent in ancient Hebrew at the time of this writing, so I encourage readers to consult linguists of ancient Semitic languages to double-check my interpretations.

*And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he hath spoken perversion against the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of bondage, to draw thee aside out of the way which the LORD thy God commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put away the evil from the midst of thee. {S}*

Jeffrey H. Tigay, a renowned commentator on the Torah, says the following about this law<sup>3</sup>:

The first case [i.e., the case in which one claims prophetic authority and backs up his claim by a sign that seems to authenticate it] is one in which the instigator's proposal is hard to resist because he seems to have divine authority for what he proposes. Moreover, from verse 6 it appears that he even claims that the proposal comes from the Lord Himself, not another god. The law puts a rational limit on the authority of prophecy and miracles. It indicates that the prohibition against worshiping other gods is an absolute, eternally binding principle, and that even prophecies and seemingly miraculous proofs to the contrary are to be disregarded.

An important observation here is that prophecies and miracles alone are insufficient proofs of divine authority. One of the key purposes of Deut 13:1-6 is to prevent the worship of an earthly creation which a miracle worker claims to be divine, but is not really divine. The purportedly divine thing might very well be the miracle worker himself. If the ultimate goal of the miracle worker is to be worshiped as a god, then it would not matter to him whether he declares himself as another god or as the Abrahamic God Himself. Therefore, it is most sensible to interpret Deut 13:1-6 such that it also applies to miracle workers who claim to be God, but are not really God, lest this commandment have not force.

For verse 3, the word for “have known” (יָדָעָה) is listed in Explanation #2 under the section of *Yada* (יָדָע) in the *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*<sup>4</sup>. Explanation #2 gives the meaning of “acquaintance” or “well-known (with implied trustworthiness),” of which the former has Deut 13:3 as an example, and the latter has Deut 1:13 and Deut 1:15 as examples. Tigay prefers the word “experienced” as a suitable translation<sup>5</sup>. I would also like to comment that the English word “empiricism” is derived from the Greek word *empeirikos* (ἐμπειρικός), meaning “experience.”

3. This might initially lead us to believe, however, that Deut 13 alone removes the possibility that anything which seems human could ever be divine. After all, without prophecies and miracles, how else do you prove divine authority? The answer is that this law does not exclude signs sent directly from God which bestow divine authority to a human as sufficient forms of proof. Therefore, it is not impossible to prove that something which seems human could have divine authority, assuming there is an Abrahamic God who interacts directly with humans and gives irrefutable signs.

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3 Tigay, Jeffrey H., *The JPS Torah Commentary*. The Jewish Publication Society, 1996, p. 129.

4 Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon, Unabridged, Electronic Database. Accessed at <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/3045.htm>.

5 Tigay, *loc. cit.*, p. 128.

4. There are some things which God is capable of doing which no miracle worker could do without divine authority. God is the most powerful, and is capable of performing things which are not only impossible for miracle workers to perform without divine authority, but are also observable.
5. Even under the assumption that the God of Abraham exists, supernatural events are extremely rare. The teleological argument for the existence of God (a.k.a. the intelligent design argument) depends on the premise that nature behaves according to consistent laws (perhaps enforced by God), of which consequences could be replicated, so long as the initial conditions are reproduced accurately<sup>6</sup>. If we deny that laws of nature are consistent, then we can no longer admit the teleological argument as a proof for God.
6. Even in the Bible, resurrection occurs less often than temptations by Satan and tests of faith by God. We must therefore assume that resurrection has an extremely low probability, even if we allow supernatural events to occur.
7. Since Jesus was thought to be a man, an observer in Jerusalem before the Resurrection and after the Crucifixion ought to presume that the probability of the Resurrection of Jesus is equal to that of any random Joe Schmoe; that is, extremely low.

One might argue that because Jesus was capable of performing miracles, the chances of His being resurrected should increase. Looking back at Deut 13:1-6, it clearly shows that the ability to perform miracles alone has no bearing on the divine status of the miracle worker, and that a miracle worker could be put to death indicates that miracle workers are unlikely to be resurrected. Furthermore, the typical Jew at the time likely believed the tales of Moses, who cast unique plagues on Egypt and parted the Red Sea ---- supernatural events which were not only titanic, but were also attested to by hundreds of thousands of observers in those stories. The fact that the miracles of Jesus, if they ever occurred, were performed mostly in private settings, or that believable illusions thereof could be replicated even with 1<sup>st</sup> Century AD technology, ought to make an observer in Jerusalem at the time skeptical.

The 12 claims of Habermas listed on the first page mention that (6) the disciples of Jesus doubted Him before the Resurrection and that (11) James doubted Him before Resurrection. These claims were originally set to strengthen the apologetic, but they also weaken it. They show that however spectacular the deeds of Jesus during His life, they were not enough to prove that Jesus had divine authority before the Resurrection.

8. It must then be therefore concluded that a responsible worshiper of the Abrahamic God must be like that observer in Jerusalem after the Crucifixion and before the Resurrection. That is, he or she ought to start with the assumption that the probability of the Resurrection of Jesus is no more than that of resurrecting a typical man.

If it could be established beyond reasonable doubt that Jesus was resurrected, even when condition #8 is adopted, then it is highly probable that Jesus was divine in some way. However, it could not go the other way around; that is, we cannot start with the assumption that Jesus was divine in some way and

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<sup>6</sup> Summarization based on Chapter 2 of Price, Robert M., ed. *The empty tomb: Jesus beyond the grave*. Prometheus Books, 2009. The original author of Chapter 2 was Michael Martin.

then say His probability of being resurrected was higher as a consequence of His being divine. That would be circular reasoning, since an observer in Jerusalem after His Crucifixion and before His Resurrection ought not to think Him divine, as explained earlier.

## Crucifixion and Burials

Evangelist-turned-Agnostic New Testament Scholar Bart Ehrman argues in his book *How Jesus Became God* that a decent burial of Jesus within three days of execution is highly unlikely given the cruel reputation of Roman crucifixions<sup>7</sup>. While it is true that Romans often let their crucifixion victims decay on the cross for many days to feed carrion crows, I am actually willing to believe that Joseph of Arimathea buried Jesus in a decent tomb shortly after the crucifixion. This I believe because the Pharisees had a reputation of strictly observing Jewish Law, which granted prompt burial even to convicts. This however, cuts both ways, as it suggests that the highly-centralized Roman government of the early imperial period was relatively tolerant towards Jewish religious practices.

## Sources of Evidence

To my knowledge, the only non-Christian source of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century AD which speaks of the Resurrection is the *Ioudaikē Archaialogia* (Ἰουδαϊκὴ ἀρχαιολογία) by Flavius Josephus<sup>8</sup>, of which the oldest surviving manuscript is from the 11<sup>th</sup> Century, a whole thousand years after the original writing. Jesus of Nazareth is mentioned in two places in this work; the Resurrection is mentioned once, but a tomb of Jesus is not mentioned. Regardless of the authenticity of those two passages, Josephus was reporting tales about Jesus which he had *heard*, and not *witnessed*, since Josephus was born after the Crucifixion. There is no evidence Josephus ever converted to Christianity, so it is likely Josephus was merely writing in the voice of Christians and did not necessarily believe those tales himself. Based on this source alone, the most generous thing which could be said in favor of the Resurrection is that tales of Jesus' Resurrection were in wide circulation in Judea at the time.

What remains are Christian sources of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century AD, namely, the letters of Paul, the Acts, and the Gospels<sup>9</sup>. There are other sources, such as the Gospel of Peter, but many non-canonical writing were rejected from the Canon precisely because they were considered apocryphal, even by devout Christians. Seven letters of Paul are firmly accepted as authentic<sup>10</sup>:

1. Galatians
2. First Thessalonians
3. First Corinthians

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7 Ehrman, Bart D. *How Jesus became God: The exaltation of a Jewish preacher from Galilee*. HarperOne, 2015. Ehrman gives this opinion in the Introduction and Chapter 4 in multiple places.

8 A critical edition of this work is in Niese, Benedict et. al, *Josephus in Greek: Niese Critical Edition with Apparatus*. Lexam Press, 1887 – 2008. An electronic edition of this work is found in <https://scholarlyeditions.brill.com/fjo/> of which the base text without apparatus is public. Jesus of Nazareth is mentioned in Book 18, Ch. 3 and Book 20, Ch. 9.

9 The authorship, proposed dates of composition, and authenticity of each section in the New Testament are described in Carson, Donald A., and Douglas J. Moo. *An introduction to the New Testament*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Zondervan Academic, 2005.

10 *Ibid.*, pp. 393, 419, 457, 480, 499, 517, 534-542, 555-568, 590, 601.

4. Second Corinthians
5. Romans
6. Philippians
7. Philemon

Among all the Canonical sources described above, none describe a witness who saw the very moment Jesus got up and walked out the tomb. The notion that Jesus was resurrected is entirely speculation based on the claims that Jesus was buried in a tomb, that the tomb had no corpse a couple days after His burial, and that some people, many of whom were already close acquaintances of Jesus beforehand, reported visions of Him thereafter.

Did the Resurrected Jesus appear to the Roman government of Judea? Did the Resurrected Jesus appear to Herod? Did the Resurrected Jesus appear to the Pharisees? Did the Resurrected Jesus appear to a large group of non-believers in the middle of the busy markets of Jerusalem? We have a vague mentioning in the Creed of 1Corinth:15 of “500 brethren” who all saw the Resurrected Jesus at the same time.

Could this had taken place in the middle of a busy public space? If this sighting had taken place in the middle of a busy city, then it would likely had quickly attracted more people than just 500, and be no doubt one of the most significant events in all of Christianity. And yet, there is no mention of it at all in any of the other sources above. We don’t know where it occurred, when it occurred, nor any names of the people present. Therefore, this sighting by the 500 brethren, if it occurred at all, likely took place in a small town or the countryside; it most likely did not occur in one of the large cities such as Jerusalem, Damascus, Tyre, Antioch, or Alexandria, which boasted populations of tens-of-thousands of people already in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century AD.

If Jesus really did rise, these sightings were private visits by Jesus to some close acquaintances, Paul, and possibly 500 people. Besides James and possibly Mary, there is no report of any other family member of Jesus visited by Him. Had Jesus really risen, we are led to believe that He did not intend to have news of His resurrection known widely, and that we should respect His desire of privacy. Furthermore, Habermas only listed the disciples, James, and Paul as witnesses of the Risen Jesus in his 12 minimal facts, without Mary nor the 500 brethren.

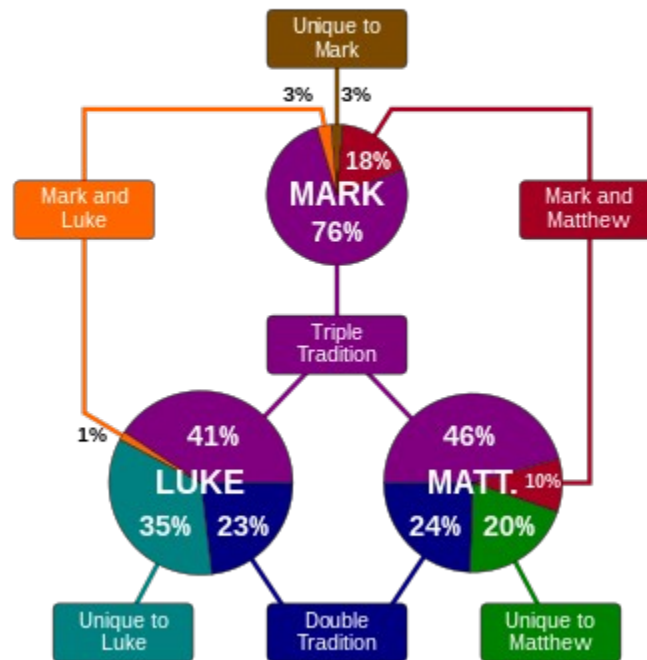
Scholars generally agree that the four Gospels were written in the late 1<sup>st</sup> Century with Mark as the oldest, John the newest, and Matthew & Luke in between the times when Mark and John were written<sup>11</sup>. In the original Greek, nearly all of Mark is copied (almost verbatim) into Matthew and Luke, as illustrated in the image below. John could be said to be an independent source, and the author of Acts is believed to be the same as the author of Luke<sup>12</sup>.

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11 *Ibid.*, pp. 152-157, 179-183, 207-211, 264-268.

12 *Ibid.*, pp. 290-297.

## Relationships between the Synoptic Gospels



Made in August 27, 2013 by Wikimedia Contributor Alecmconroy based on data reported in Honoré, A.M. (1968). "A statistical study of the synoptic problem". *Novum Testamentum* 10 (2/3): 95–147. DOI:10.2307/1560364. Full image can be found at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Relationship\\_between\\_synoptic\\_gospels-en.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Relationship_between_synoptic_gospels-en.svg).

In Matthew, Mary Magdalene and Mary the Mother of James encounter an angel at the tomb who opens it, shows that it is empty, and tells them of the Risen Jesus. Shortly after, the two ladies encounter the Risen Jesus nearby, who then later meets the 11 disciples at Galilee, which is 100 miles away from Jerusalem. No more encounters with the Risen Jesus are recorded in Matthew. Matthew also mentions tomb guards who were dumbstruck by the angel, whereas the other Gospels say nothing of tomb guards.

In Mark, Mary Magdalene, Mary the Mother of James, and Salome visit the tomb, and find it already open and without a corpse. They meet a young man inside the tomb, who tells them to instruct the disciples to meet the Risen Jesus at Galilee. In reliable manuscripts, Mark ends abruptly here. Based on Mark alone, we don't know for certain whether the Risen Jesus is even encountered at all.

In Luke, Mary Magdalene, Mary Mother of James, Joanna, and a few other unnamed companions, of whom the total number is not known, visit the tomb, and find it already open and without a corpse. They encounter two men inside the tomb who tell them of the Risen Jesus. They report this to the apostles, and Peter runs to the tomb, looks inside, and turns back. Luke does not mention an encounter between the Risen Jesus and the ladies.

In Luke, the first encounter with the Risen Jesus is with two unnamed disciples who do not initially recognize Him near Emmaus, a village near Jerusalem; Jesus is not recognized until after they enter Emmaus. Jesus departs, and the two unnamed disciples go to Jerusalem and hold a meeting with the rest of the 11 disciples, during which Jesus appears to them. Jesus instructs them to stay in Jerusalem until they become “endued with power from on high.” Jesus then leaves his disciples after a visit to Bethany.

In Acts, which was written by the same author as Luke, Jesus appeared time-to-time over the course of forty days at unnamed locations and to an unknown number of people. Acts 1:4 suggests that the disciples stayed in Jerusalem for at least forty days. If this be the case, then the disciples could not have verified any sightings of Jesus outside Jerusalem.

In John, Mary Magdalene visits the tomb, finds it already open without a corpse, and then reports it to Peter and another unnamed disciple, who run back to the tomb with Mary Magdalene, and see that her report is true. Peter and the other disciple return back, but Mary stays. Mary encounters two angels and Jesus at the tomb and reports this to the disciples. The disciples do not believe her at first, until Jesus appears to all the disciples except Thomas inside a house (presumably in Jerusalem) that same evening. Thomas encounters Jesus in that same house eight days later with the other disciples. Jesus then encounters the disciples again on a fishing trip sometime later.

This is all we have for textual evidence, and it is not very good. They differ in the locations (sometimes as many as 100 miles apart), the names of the people involved, the number of people involved, the timing of the events (like being told to stay put in Jerusalem for 40 days, or the time the tomb door was opened). Almost all of Mark is copied into Matthew and Luke, and yet they still have many obvious differences.

## Reconciliations

Could we attempt to harmonize the narratives?

When deciding whether angels or men were involved, we could imagine that angels were at the tomb who disguised themselves as men. Mary Magdalene would have reported the presence of men, which explains the Mark and Luke versions, but this would mean that the embellished versions of the report in Matthew and John actually became more accurate than the original report. Combined with the fact that Mark is the oldest and a parent source of Matthew and Luke, it is more probable that men were present and that Mary Magdalene’s report got embellished to contain angels in Matthew and John.

Was the tomb door open or closed when Mary Magdalene arrived? Three sources, including Mark, say it was already open, so we choose open. Were the men/angels present before Mary Magdalene entered or after Mary entered? Only John says after, but Matthew also says that no sooner had Mary arrived, than an angel arrived and opened the door for her. We therefore choose before.

If we admit the tomb narratives of the Gospels as historically reliable sources, then the most probable scenario is that Mary Magdalene arrived when the tomb door was already open, and men were already present. Under the assumption that the probability of a Resurrection of Jesus be equal to that of an



ordinary man, the most logical explanation is that the man/men moved the body. Has no one in all of Christendom ever been suspicious of this?

It gets worse. If we admit Paul as a reliable source in support of the Resurrection, then we must also admit Paul whenever he weakens the belief that Jesus was divine. Romans 1:3 says:

*Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh*

This verse in the original Greek is:

περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ τοῦ γενομένου ἐκ σπέρματος Δαυὶδ κατὰ σάρκα<sup>13</sup>

which has the phrases ἐκ σπέρματος Δαυὶδ (*ek spermatos David; out from the seed of David*), and κατὰ σάρκα (*kata sarka; according to the flesh*). The Greek word for *seed*, σπέρματος (*spermatos*), even gave us the English word for sperm. Thus, we have two phrases hammering home the idea that Jesus was a biological descendant of David, not just a symbolic one. And the only documents which speak of the ancestry of Jesus are Matthew and Luke, which only give genealogies of Joseph, and not of Mary.

The Genealogies of Joseph in Matthew and Luke are completely different. In Matthew 1 it is:

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah&Tamar, Perez, Hezron, Ram, Amminadab, Nahshon, Salmon&Rahab, Boaz&Ruth, Obed, Jesse, David&Uriah, Solomon, Rehoboam, Abijah, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Jehoram, Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh, Amon, Josiah, Jeconiah, Shealtiel, Zerubbabel, Abiud, Eliakim, Azor, Zadok, Achim, Eliud, Eleazar, Matthan, Jacob, Joseph

Whereas in Luke 3:23-38, it is:

Adam, Seth, Enos, Cainan, Maleleel, Jared, Enoch, Mathusala, Lamech, Noah, Shem, Arphaxad, Cainan, Sala, Heber, Phalec, Ragau, Saruch, Nachor, Thara, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, Phares, Esrom, Aram, Aminadab, Naasson, Salmon, Boaz, Obed, Jesse, David, Nathan, Mattatha, Menan, Melea, Eliakim, Jonam, Joseph, Judah, Simeon, Levi, Matthat, Jorim, Eliezer, Jose, Er, Elmodam, Cosam, Addi, Melchi, Neri, Salathiel, Zorobabel, Rhesa, Joannan, Juda, Joseph, Semei, Mattathias, Maath, Nagge, Esli, Naum, Amos, Mattathias, Joseph, Jannai, Melchi, Levi, Matthat, Heli, Joseph

They both have David in their lineages, but nowhere in the Bible is Mary's ancestry given, so we have no way of tying Mary's ancestry to David. Even if we somehow tie Mary's ancestry to David, it is irrelevant that Mary was descended from David because the ancient Jews did not trace royal lineage along the maternal line. In other words, Romans 1:3 is saying that Joseph was the biological father of Jesus, and not the Holy Spirit.

## What Got Resurrected?

What kind of a body did the Risen Jesus have? Did it have flesh and bone? Was it only a ghost? Was it photographable? If it had flesh and bone, it could not have exited the tomb in Matthew's version,

13 From critical edition of New Testament in *Novum Testamentum Graece*. "Nestle-Aland 28th Edition. German Bible Society. 28 Lrg. Rev./ed." by *Institute for NT Textual Research*. Stuttgart: *Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft* 810 (2013). Electronic version without apparatus can be accessed at <https://www.academic-bible.com/en/online-bibles/novum-testamentum-graeca-na-28/read-the-bible-text/>.

because the tomb was yet to be opened when Mary Magdalene visited it. In Luke, the Resurrected Body ate broiled fish and felt like a real body when touched; this description is explicit.

Was the Resurrected Jesus capable of walking through walls? This is not explicitly shown in any part of the Bible, but is inferred from the fact that the tomb door was found still shut in Matthew, and that Jesus appeared inside a locked house in John 20:19. Therefore, it must be that the Gospel authors had different Christologies in mind. Without a unified Christology in the Canon, it should be no surprise that Christianity came to have so many competing sects.

## Fallacies

Though not explicit, it can be inferred that claims 6-11 of Habermas are basically saying the following:

How is it that Sunday became the new Sabbath, a sacred day which no Jew dared to alter, and that a successful religious movement begin, if nothing significant happened? How could people be persuaded by the message of the Resurrection to make these big changes if it were not true? How could James and the apostles become so confident in the divinity of Jesus (to the point of martyrdom) in so short a time if they were not persuaded by the message of the Resurrection? How could these improbable things all happen if the truth of the message of the Resurrection be improbable?

Persuasive power and fast spread of belief do not imply a high probability of truth. If social media has taught us anything, it is that misinformation often spreads faster and is believed by more people than truth. Suicide bombers and deadly cult practices have taught us that a willingness to die for a belief does not imply a high probability of truth.

As for sources of information, it is known that New Testament manuscripts are old and abundant, as shown in the chart below.

Thucydides, <i>History of the Peloponnesian War</i> (c. 460-400 BC)	8 surviving manuscripts; oldest from 900 AD, with some fragments from 1 <sup>st</sup> Century AD
Julius Caesar, <i>Galic Wars</i> (c. 58-50 BC)	Several; only 9 or 10 of good quality; oldest from 9 <sup>th</sup> Century AD
Livy, <i>Annals of the Roman People</i> (59 BC - 17AD)	Only 35 out of 142 books survived; 20 extant manuscripts; only 1 manuscript containing fragments of books 3-6 is as old as the 4 <sup>th</sup> Century AD
Tacitus, <i>History and Annals</i> (c. 100 AD)	Only 4 ½ out of 14 books of <i>Histories</i> and 10 (with portions of 2 more) of the 16 books of <i>Annals</i> survived in 2 manuscripts dating from the 9 <sup>th</sup> and 11 <sup>th</sup> Centuries AD.
<i>New Testament</i> (c. 1 <sup>st</sup> Century AD)	Over 5400 Manuscripts, of which the oldest are from the 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> Century AD

F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1960) pp. 16-17.

Upon seeing the great abundance of New Testament manuscripts from no later than a few centuries after the original writing, compared to those of other classical texts, one might initially believe that

events in the New Testament could be asserted with more certainty than any other event of ancient history. After all, some persons and events in ancient history have only one or two sources mentioning them, and scholars often tentatively accept them as real history despite the poverty of surviving attestations thereto. This, however, is misleading.

An abundance of old manuscripts only makes it easier to figure out what the author originally wrote in his or her copy of the text. It does not imply that the author wrote reliable history in his or her original copy of the text to begin with. Moreover, it is not the same as having more attestations to a particular event or person; it just means that the same source or witness can be more reliably constructed to its original form. Primary source documents are also not the only source of historical information; archaeology studies physical remains of historical time periods with scientific methods.

I forecast that cheap novels from drug stores will have more surviving manuscripts for archaeologists in the far future than biographies of, say, Bismarck. But I sure hope archaeologists won't reconstruct our history based on CVS romance novels simply because of their abundant manuscripts. The abundance of New Testament manuscripts might initially be a source of pride for Christians, but it also suggests that precious writing material and scribes, which were scarce in antiquity, were disproportionately devoted to Biblical texts when they could otherwise had been directed to the preservation of other classical texts, which became utterly starved of those resources. How great would it be, had the papyri and ink of just 10 out of over 5400 New Testament manuscripts been used to copy Democritus, the ancient father of atomic theory, whose work we have left but fragments?

## Suggested Alternative Explanation

During the Enlightenment Era, some scholars who wanted to challenge the traditional authority of the Church put forth the hypothesis that the disciples stole the body of Jesus from the sepulchre and spread lies of His Resurrection after Easter. Dr. William Lane Craig, a renowned Christian apologist, dismisses this hypothesis with a six-point framework<sup>14</sup>:

1. The best explanation will have greater explanatory scope than other explanations. That is, it will explain more of the evidence:

Dr. Craig acknowledges that the conspiracy hypothesis does indeed satisfy this criterion.

2. The best explanation will have greater explanatory power than other explanations. That is, it will make the evidence more probable:

Dr. Craig appeals to the criterion of embarrassment of women reporting the missing body, prioritizes Mark, voices skepticism about the tomb guards, and rejects the Gospel of Peter. He then appeals to the criterion of embarrassment again about the un-dazzling descriptions of the Risen Jesus, in contrast to the description in Daniel 12:2. Dr. Craig then asks questions which skeptics might ask such as why Jesus appeared not to the Sanhedrin. He finishes by

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14 Craig, William L., "Shall We Resurrect the Conspiracy Theory?", Reasonable Faith with William Lane Craig, April 05, 2020, Accessed Oct. 25, 2022, <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/question-answer/shall-we-resurrect-the-conspiracy-theory>.

demonstrating a lack of motivation of the disciples' committing to a conspiracy, especially if it endangered their lives.

3. The best explanation will be more plausible than other explanations. That is, it will fit better with true background beliefs.

Dr. Craig correctly states that the ancient Second Temple Jews believed in a general resurrection at the end of the world, as opposed to isolated resurrections of individuals before the apocalypse. He then makes an error when he dismisses Pagan myths as possible sources of inspiration for individual resurrections, as he ignores tales of Odysseus, Orpheus, and Herakles visiting the underworld. Given that Judea had been Hellenized for over 350 years since the conquests of Alexander, it should be no surprise that Matthew 12:40 has the following verse:

*For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*

Furthermore, Herodotus recounts a tale of a miracle-working poet named Aristeas<sup>15</sup>:

*They say that Aristeas, who was in birth inferior to none of the citizens, entered into a fuller's shop in Proconnesos and there died; and the fuller closed his workshop and went away to report the matter to those who were related to the dead man. And when the news had been spread abroad about the city that Aristeas was dead, a man of Kyzikos who had come from the town of Artake entered into controversy with those who said so, and declared that he had met him going towards Kyzikos and had spoken with him: and while he was vehement in dispute, those who were related to the dead man came to the fuller's shop with the things proper in order to take up the corpse for burial; and when the house was opened, Aristeas was not found there either dead or alive. In the seventh year after this he appeared at Proconnesos and composed those verses which are now called by the Hellenes the Arimaspeia, and having composed them he disappeared the second time.*

4. The best explanation will be less contrived than other explanations. That is, it won't require adopting as many new beliefs which have no independent evidence.

Dr. Craig makes the case that there is little to no evidence of the motives and actions of the disciples described in the conspiracy hypothesis. He correctly states that hypotheses tend to multiply in order to defend against objections to the theory. However, he takes it as fact that the sighting by the 500 brethren actually happened, even though it is only mentioned once in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians without the place, time, nor any names of the people present.

While this criterion conforms better to Ockham's Razor, it is sometimes a fallacy. Sometimes a longer, speculative, and contrived explanation is more probable than a short one, especially if the short one is an extraordinary claim, such as a supernatural event. As demonstrated on page 4, the teleological argument for God is only admissible with the premise that the laws of nature are consistent.

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15 Herodotus, *Histories*, Book 4, part 14, translated by G.C. Macaulay.

5. The best explanation will be disconfirmed by fewer accepted beliefs than other explanations. That is, it won't conflict with as many accepted beliefs.

Dr. Craig says that the Conspiracy Hypothesis tends to be disconfirmed by our general knowledge of conspiracies, and their instability and tendency to unravel. He also says it is disconfirmed by accepted beliefs such as the sincerity of the disciples, the nature of first century Jewish messianic expectations, and so on.

6. The best explanation will meet conditions (1)-(5) so much better than the others that there's little chance that one of the other explanations, after further investigation, will do better in meeting these conditions.

Dr. Craig makes the case that even the hallucination hypothesis, which is usually rejected, explains better the sincerity of the disciples in upholding their beliefs after the Resurrection. Therefore, the conspiracy hypothesis is utterly inadequate.

The problem here is that Dr. Craig ignores the possibility of a comitatus oath sworn by the disciples. Indeed, Matthew 16:24-28, Mark 8:34-38, and Luke 9:23-27 describe an oath demanded by Jesus:

*....Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels. (Mark 8:34-38)*

Moreover, John 11 says the following about the time when Jesus decided to return to Judea after His expulsion:

*8. His disciples say unto him, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee; and goest thou thither again?....*

*....*

*14. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him.*

*15. Then said Thomas, which is called Didymus, unto his fellowdisciples, Let us also go, that we may die with Him.*

These verses suggest that the disciples had already sworn a comitatus oath to Jesus before the Crucifixion and were therefore willing to die for their master's honor. An oath could be further incentivized if the master pays the debts of the retainers' families. I therefore suggest the following alternative scenario:

The oath-sworn disciples failed to defend their master to the death when Jesus was arrested. After the Crucifixion, the regretful disciples felt disgraced and apprehensive about their future reputation, having

not only followed a false prophet, but also failed to defend Him to the death in accordance to their oaths. They bribed some men who hid the body and proclaimed that Jesus had risen, which Mary Magdalene believed (indeed, she believes the man in the tomb at face value in Mark). The oath-sworn disciples spread rumors of the Resurrection and prophecies thereof to clear their names and to exalt the memory of their master, which were inspired by Greek myths transmitted to Judea when it was Hellenized for 350 years after Alexander. Some disciples were willing to become martyrs for their late master in accordance to their original oaths, and the Christian faith was thus born.

As mentioned before, the teleological argument for the existence of God is no longer admissible if a supernatural event is more likely than an event such as this. Prioritizing Mark and applying the criterion of embarrassment to the women who reported the missing body supports the reconstructed tomb narrative of page 8. That is, Mary Magdalene arrived at the tomb when it was already open and men were already present. With this in mind, I invite the gracious reader to apply the six-point framework above to the hypothesis just told.

## **A Pascal's Wager for Not Asserting the Trinity**

Assuming that the God of Abraham is real:

Case 1: The Trinity is false, and Jesus was not divine. Then worshiping Jesus and recognizing the Trinity would be a form of polytheism.

Case 2: The Trinity is true, and Jesus was truly divine. Since Jesus is One with God, then worshiping the God of Abraham even without explicitly recognizing the divinity of Jesus would still be a worship of Jesus, since they are One.

Therefore, the safer option is to not assert the Trinity.

## **Further Discussion**

Could we make a case in support of Christianity based on the practical consequences of its beliefs, regardless of its truth? The idea of electric current was based on the false belief that positive charges flow through a wire when electricity flows. However, it is now known that electrons, which have negative charge, flow through the wire in the opposite direction. Even today however, electric flow is conceptually modeled as electric current, that is, as positive charge flowing opposite to the electron flow. The idea of electric current is still reliable and useful despite its being completely false. Could the beliefs of Christianity serve to induce behaviors that result in good ethical standards, successful societies, and scientific progress, regardless of its truth?

My attempt to answer this question will be in another paper.